

A RECONSIDERATION OF *PRAJÑĀ*:
FROM THE *UPANIṢADS* TO BUDDHISM

Preamble

In the past many articles have been written on *prajñā*, but their scope has been confined to Buddhist sources, and consequently they have approached the subject largely from a Buddhist perspective. Meanwhile, to the best of my knowledge, few attempts have been made to analyze *prajñā* in the context of Indian religious thought. In my view, however, our understanding of *prajñā* must take place against the background of Indian religious thought in general. The present article is an interim report that attempts to fill this gap in our understanding of *prajñā*.

1. The Meaning of Prajñā

The element *pra* in the Sanskrit term *prajñā* (Pāli *paññā*) is an intensive prefix meaning "before" or "excessively", while the second element *jñā* (*Skt.*) or *ñā* (Pali) signifies 'knowledge'. Therefore, *prajñā* refers not to ordinary knowledge but to "wisdom" or "fundamental knowledge," and it has been translated by a wide range of terms in English, including "true (or transcendental) wisdom," "intelligence," "knowledge," "judgement," "discrimination," "under-standing" and "intellect."

Western scholars sometimes also translate *prajñā* with the Greek word *gnōsis*. This is because the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{jñā}$, meaning “to know”, is a cognate of the root *gno-* found in Greek *gignōskō* and Latin *gnōscō/nōscō*, corresponding to English “know”. As is suggested by the Latin *cog[^]nitus* and English cog[^]nition and k[^]nowledge, these are all related terms shared by the Indo-European languages of common ancestry.

The term *pra-jñā*, signifying “wisdom”, has thus been created by adding *pra* to this word for “knowledge”. There also exists the term *vi-jñāna*, meaning “knowledge”, “understanding” or “recognition” and formed by adding the prefix *vi-*, implying “separation”, to the noun *jñāna*, deriving from the verb *jñā* “to know”. This term *vi-jñāna* is often interpreted in the sense of discriminating or analytical knowledge and is contrasted with *prajñā*, which corresponds to nondiscriminating knowledge.

Generally speaking, in Buddhism *prajñā* differs from *vi-jñāna* in that it cannot be learnt or accumulated. Instead, it refers to the wisdom of enlightenment that sees “*Dharma*” as it is. That is to say, it is the true wisdom by means of which one comprehends the nature of things within the current of “*Dharma*” and clearly perceives the identity obtaining between oneself and this true nature of things, through the experience of which it is possible to attain enlightenment. As is indicated by the following quotations, in early Buddhist scriptures *prajñā* represents the light of salvation that provides the opportunity for escaping all the suffering of this world and experiencing immortality and *nirvāṇa* during this lifetime.

Always observing the precepts, possessed of wisdom (*paññā*), with mind composed, thought turn inwards, and alert: it is he who crosses the flood (*ogha*) so hard to cross. (*Suttanipāta* 174)

Abstaining from thoughts of lust, all fetters overcome, and with pleasure and passion exhausted: it is he who sinks not into the abyss. (*Suttanipāta* 175)

See this wisdom (*paññā*) of the Tathāgatas: giving light and vision like a fire blazing in the night, it dispels the doubt of those who come [to them and their wisdom]. (*Theragāthā* 1.1.3)

In this sense, for Buddhists *prajñā* is the supreme virtue. Many Buddhists have demonstrated the path whereby one observes this *prajñā* and the norms of daily life in the form of "morality" (*śīla*) enters "meditation" (*śamādhi*) and controls the body and mind while maintaining this way of life, and by repeatedly practising morality and meditation cultivates wisdom, awakens to the "*Dharma*" within one's gradually heightened spirituality, and reaches unsurpassed enlightenment. It is this wisdom of enlightenment to which *prajñā* corresponds.

II. "Wisdom" in the Early Upaniṣads

The term *prajñā* is not used in the *Upaniṣads* as a whole with any greater frequency than other words pertaining to knowledge, such as *jñāna*, *buddhi* and *vidyā*, and it would not appear that any special importance was attached to it. In a number of texts it is, however, sometimes associated with *prāṇa*, *ātman* and *brahman* and is used in the sense of the supreme principle. What are probably the earliest examples of this usage are to be found in the following passages from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, thought to predate the emergence of Buddhism (ca. mid-4th cent. B.C.)¹.

- (a) Just as a mass of salt, without inside and without outside, is entirely a mass of taste, so too is this *ātman*, without inside and without outside, entirely a mass of wisdom (*prajñāna-ghana*). Arising out of these elements, it disappears into them, and after death there is no consciousness. (*Bṛhad. Upa.* IV.5.13)²
- (b) [*Brahman*] is to be thought of (*upāsītā*) as wisdom (*prajñā*). What is the essence of wisdom (*prajñatā*)? It is nothing other than speech. Relatives, the Four Vedas, ... all living beings are

¹ The quotations from the *Upaniṣads* given below are taken from V. P. LIMAYE and R. D. VADEKAR, eds., *Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads*, Vol. I (Gandhi Memorial Edition, Poona, 1958).

² *Sa yathā saindhavaghano 'nantaro 'bāhyaḥ kṛtsno rasaghana eva, evaṃ vā are 'yam ātmānantaro 'bāhyaḥ kṛtsnaḥ prajñānaghana eva, etebhyo bbūtebhyah samutthāya tāni evānuvinaśyati, na pretya samijñāsti.* (*Bṛhad. Upa.* IV. 5.13).

- recognized (*prajñāyante*) by speech. Speech is truly the highest *brahman* (*vāg vai ... paramaṃ brahma*). (Ibid. IV.1.2)³
- (c) As a man when embraced by a woman beloved knows nothing within or without, so too does this *puruṣa* when embraced by the intelligent *ātman* (*prājñenātmanā*) know nothing within or without. That indeed is his form in which his desire has been satisfied, in which his self is his desire, in which he has no desire, and in which he is without sorrow. (Ibid. IV.3.21)⁴
- (d) As a heavily laden cart moves on creaking, so too does this bodily self (*śārīra ātmā*), mounted by the intelligent *ātman* (*prājñenātmanā*), move on creaking when one is breathing one's last. (Ibid. IV. 3.3 5)⁵

Although such examples are few in number, the view that "ātman qua wisdom" (*prajñā-ātman*) represents the fundamental principle and contrasts with the "bodily ātman" is to be found already in the early *Upaniṣads*. Worthy of special note is the fact that *prajñā* is here regarded as one of the attributes of *ātman* or *brahman*⁶.

³ *Prajñety enad upāsītā, kā prajñātā..., vāg eva samrāt iti hovāca, vācā vai samrāt bandhuh prajñāyate, ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo 'tharvāṅgīrasa...sarvāṅī ca bhūtāni vācaiva samrāt prajñāyante, vāg vai samrāt paramaṃ brahma. (Ibid. IV. 1.2)*

⁴ *Tadyathā priyayā striyā saṃpariṣvaktō na bāhyaṃ kiṃcana veda nāntaram, evam evāyaṃ puruṣaḥ prājñenātmanā saṃpariṣvaktō na bāhyaṃ kiṃcana veda nāntaram, tadvā asyaitad āptakāmam ātmakāmam akāmaṃ rūpaṃ śokāntaram. (Ibid. IV.3.21)*

⁵ *Tadyathā 'naḥ susamāhitam utsarjad yāyād evamevāyaṃ śārīra ātmā prājñenātmanā 'nvārūḍha utsarjan yāti, yatraitad ūrdhva ucchvāsī bhavati. (Ibid. IV.3.35)*

⁶ YAMAGUCHI ESHŌ ("Indo tetsugaku ni okeru chie no mondai" [The question of wisdom in Indian philosophy], in *Mori Mikisaburō hakushi shōju kinen Tōyōgaku ronshū* [Collected essays on Oriental studies in honour of Dr. Mori Mikisaburō; Hōyū Shoten, 1979], pp. 1093-1107) has pointed out that in the *Upaniṣads* this "ātman characterized by wisdom" (*prajñātman*) represents the imperishable root-source of all existents, resides within ourselves as the "inner guide" (*antaryāmin*), and is equated with both the physiological self (*annarasamayātman* and *prāṇamayātman*) and the psychological self (*manomayātman*, *jijñānamayātman* and *ānandamayātman*) and that this has

In (c) and (d), however, we find not *prajñā* but the adjectival form *prajñā*, which, as may be seen in (d), forms a contrasting pair with *śārīra* (from *śārira*) and means 'intelligent', as in the phrase *prājñena-ātmanā*. Passage (c) is considered to describe the third of the three states of *ātman* (*viz.* waking, sleep and deep sleep), but the Vedānta school that was to develop later emphasizes a fourth and ultimate state of *ātman* transcending even this "pure knowledge" (*prajñāna-ghana*)⁷.

The term *prajñā* appears with considerable frequency in two other early *Upaniṣads*, namely, the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*, two prose *Upaniṣads* affiliated to the *Ṛg Veda*. Both are thought to have been composed before the time of Śākyamuni, and in Part 4 of the latter there appears a king of Kāśī named Ajātaśatru, a different person, however, from the homonymous son of King Bimbisāra, who was king of Magadha. But on the basis of current research, it may be safely said that the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* does not predate Śākyamuni by any great length of time. Part 3 of this work includes a section in which Indra instructs King Pratardana on *prāṇa* (breath), and here we find repeated mention of *prajñā*.

- (e) I (*viz.* Indra) am *prāṇa*. As such think of me as *ātman* qua wisdom (*pra-jñātman*) as life, as immortality.... With wisdom (*prajñā*) one obtains true conception. (*Kau. Upa. III. 2*)⁸
- (f) *Prāṇa* is *ātman* qua wisdom, and it supports and animates this body. This, therefore, should be thought of as the "Recitation of Praise" (*uktha*). *Prāṇa* is wisdom, and wisdom is *prāṇa*. These two dwell together in this body, and together they depart. (*Ibid. III.3*)⁹

parallels with the analysis of human existence in the Buddhist theory of "five aggregates".

⁷ NAKAMURA HAJIME, *Vedānta tetsugaku no hatten* (The development of Vedānta philosophy), Iwanami Shoten, 1955, pp. 293-296.

⁸ *Prāṇo 'smi, prajñātmanāṇi mām āyur amṛtam ity upāsva, ... prajñayā satyaṇi saṅkalpam.* (*Kau. Upa. III. 2*)

⁹ *Atha khalu prāṇa eva prajñātmedaṇi śārīram parigrhyothāpayati, tasmād etad evoktham upāsita, yo vai prāṇaḥ sā prajñā, yā vā prajñā sa prāṇaḥ, saha hy etāv asmin śārīre vasataḥ, sahotkrāmataḥ.* (*Ibid. III.3*)

- (g) [The ten elements of wisdom consisting of] speech, breath (*prāṇa*), the eye, the ear, the tongue, the two hands, the body, the genitals, the two feet, and the mind have each been extracted as one portion of wisdom. These externally correlated elements each correspond to [the ten elements of existence consisting of] names, fragrance, form, sound, taste, movement, pleasure and pain, bliss, delight and procreation, going, and thought and desire. Wisdom mounts on the ten elements of wisdom consisting of speech, etc., and obtains the ten elements of existence consisting of names, etc. Without wisdom nothing would be possible and nothing would be cognized. (*Ibid.* III.5-7)¹⁰
- (h) The elements of existence are sustained by the elements of wisdom, and the elements of wisdom are sustained by *prāṇa*. Moreover, this *prāṇa* is *ātman* qua wisdom, it is bliss, ageless, and immortal.... He is the world-protector, the world-sovereign, and the lord of all. One should know (*vidyāt*) him as my *ātman*. (*Ibid.* III.8)¹¹

The above passages from Part 3 of the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* constitute the "Doctrine of *Prāṇa*", and *prāṇa* is here identified with wisdom (*prajñā*), life and immortality. A person is alive so long as *prāṇa* resides within the body, and the sense organs function merely in accordance with *prāṇa*, which is identified with *ātman* qua wisdom (*prajñā-ātman*) and is conversely also regarded as a part of wisdom.

The *Upaniṣad* to evidence the next greatest frequency of allusions to *prajñā* is the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, and they are concentrated particularly in the section on the "essence of *ātman*" in Part 3. According to the investigations of A.B. Keith and others, Part 3 dates from around 500 B.C. , which coincides with the rise of

¹⁰ This represents a summary of *ibid.* III.5-7.

¹¹ This represents a summary of *ibid.* III. 8.

Buddhism¹². Here too, as was the case in the above quotations, *prajñā* is described as the fundamental knowledge underpinning everything else, and it is given as an alternative name for *ātman* or *brahman*.

- (i) Who is he whom we think of as *ātman*? (*Aitareya Upa.* III.1.1)¹³
- (j) That which is the heart and mind is consciousness, perception, discrimination, wisdom (*prajñāna*), knowledge, notion, resolve, thought, thoughtfulness, impulse, memory, concepts, purpose, breath, desire, and will. All these are but names (*nāmadheya*) for wisdom (*prajñā*). (*Ibid.* III.1.2)¹⁴
- (k) All this is guided by wisdom (*prajñā-netra*), is supported by wisdom (*prajñāna*). The world is guided by wisdom, the basis is wisdom (*prajñā*). *Brahman* is wisdom (*prajñāna*). (*Ibid.* III.1.3)¹⁵
- (l) Having soared from this world by means of this intelligent *ātman* (*prajñenātmanā*), he obtained all desires in yonder heavenly world and became immortal—yea, became [immortal]. (*Ibid.* III.1.4)¹⁶

In these passages both *prajñā* and *prajñāna* are used, with the former being a feminine noun and the latter a neuter noun, but here they are both used in more or less the same meaning. In essence, this wisdom corresponds to *prāṇa*, the fundamental entity underlying all else, and to *ātman* or *brahman*, and this represents one of the distinctive features of the *Upaniṣads*, with their philosophical leaning towards monistic realism. Moreover, when compared with *prajñā* in Buddhism, this principle constitutes a decisive difference.

¹² See A.B. KEITH, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, 2 vols., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971 [2nd ed.].

¹³ *Ko 'yam ātmeti vāyam upāśmahe.* (*Aitareya Upa.* III.1.1)

¹⁴ *Yad etad dhṛd ayaṃ manaś caitat, saṃjñānaṃ ājñānaṃ vijñānaṃ prajñānaṃ medhā dṛṣṭir dhr̥tir matir manīṣā jūtiḥ smṛtiḥ saṃkalpaḥ kraturasaḥ kāmo vāśa iti sarvāṇyevaitāni prajñānasya nāmadheyāni bhavanti.* (*Ibid.* III.1.2)

¹⁵ *Sarvaṃ tat prajñānetram, prajñāne pratiṣṭhitam, prajñānetro lokah, prajñā pratiṣṭhā, prajñānaṃ brahma.* (*Ibid.* III.1.3)

¹⁶ *Sa etena prajñenātmanāsmāl lokād utkramyāmuṣmīn svarge loke sarvān kāmān āptvā-amṛtaḥ samabhavat samabhavat.* (*Ibid.* III.1.4)

But it is the functions or attributes of *prajñā* that merit special attention. In the *Upaniṣads* *prajñā* is associated with the supreme godhead (*brahman*, etc.), and, as was indicated in the final quotation (1), one escapes by means of this fundamental wisdom from this world to the other world (viz. heaven), where one fulfills one's desires (*kāma*) and attains immortality (*amṛta*).

III. The Functions of *Prajñā* and the State of *Nirvāṇa*

In Buddhism, on the other hand, it goes without saying that *prajñā* represents the wisdom of enlightenment. As was noted earlier, by means of this wisdom, so it is claimed, one eliminates all mental defilements and crosses from this shore to the other shore, that is, to the world of enlightenment. The correspondences between Buddhism and the *Upaniṣads* with regard to the functions of *prajñā* may be summarized in the following manner.

*Functions of *Prajñā**

Upaniṣads

From this world to yonder heavenly world; fulfillment of desires, immortality

Buddhism

From this shore to the other shore; elimination of mental defilements, attainment of enlightenment (= *nirvāṇa*)

The ascent from this world to the heavenly world in the *Upaniṣads* corresponds to the crossing from this shore to the other shore in Buddhism, while the fulfillment of desires and immortality correspond to the elimination of defilements and enlightenment respectively. In Buddhism, enlightenment corresponds to *nirvāṇa*, and it is common knowledge that *nirvāṇa* was frequently termed "immortality" (*amṛta*), which was of course a borrowing from Brahmanism. Although there are thus close correspondences in phraseology between Buddhism and the *Upaniṣads*, an important difference may be seen in the fact that the fulfillment of desires in the *Upaniṣads* has taken on the opposite meaning in Buddhism,

becoming the elimination of mental defilements. I next wish to consider this point in a little more detail.

According to the *Upaniṣads*, Vedic rites are generally centred on the sacrificial fire, and those who know the true hidden meaning of these ritual actions (*karma*-) are said to be born in heaven, where they are able to fulfill all desires and attain immortality. The term *karma-yoga* (*karma-mārga*)¹⁷ is used to signify the process or ritual action leading to this form of emancipation. These Vedic rites are performed in order to obtain longevity, prosperity, happiness, wealth, and other benefits, or, as was stated in one of the earlier quotations, to be reborn in heaven and fulfill all desires, and their aim is thus nothing other than the pursuit of an insatiable desire for life.

In Buddhism, on the other hand, it is indicated that those who control their desires during this lifetime and devote themselves to religious practices while living in accordance with the rules of rites (*karman*) prescribed by the Buddhist community will acquire true wisdom and eventually attain to *nirvāṇa*. The fulfillment of desires in the *Upaniṣads* was thus understood by Buddhism as a form of mental defilement, while ritual action (*karman*) was regarded not as

¹⁷ The word *karman* is polysemous. Basically, being a neuter noun deriving from the verb √ *kr*, it signifies movement, action or duty, but in the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas it is identified with religious duty, particularly the chief religious duty of "sacrifice," which was also called *kriyā* ('action'), and "the unalterable law was, that these mystical ceremonies for good or for bad, moral or immoral, ..were destined to produce their effects." (See S. DASGUPTA, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, [1st ed. Cambridge, 1922], p. 22.).

In addition, the term *karma-yoga* signifies the practice of all religious acts, including rites, sacrifices and offerings, and in concrete terms it refers to religious acts such as pilgrimage, deity worship, ascetic discipline and charitable acts. This path to liberation was later gradually systematized. For example, in the first half of the *Bhagavadgītā* it is stated that there are two paths to liberation, namely, that of knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*, *jñāna-yaññā* or *sāṅkhya-yoga*) for the philosopher and that of action (*karma-yoga* or *karma-mārga*) for the *yogin*, and in the second half of the same work a third path is added, namely, that of devotion (*bhakti-yoga*) for devotees who dedicate their devotion to the supreme being. Still later Rāmānuja, who wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, expounded four paths in which the practice of "surrendering oneself to the supreme godhead" (*prapatti*) was distinguished from *bhakti-yoga*, while in the *Arthapañcaka* he added the fifth path of "surrendering oneself to one's teacher" (*ācārya-abhimāna-yoga*).

a means of achieving one's desires but as a ceremony for maintaining a way of life geared to the control of desire¹⁸.

In this fashion there is a clear-cut contrast between the two, and this contrast may also be seen in the meaning of the term *nirvāṇa*. On the basis of its root *nir-√vā* ("to blow out"), *nirvāṇa* in this sense is frequently interpreted to mean "a state in which [the afflictions of passion, hatred and delusion] have been blown out." For example, in the *Samyutta-nikāya* it is stated that *nirvāṇa* is the termination of passion, the termination of hatred, the termination of delusion, and the termination of all mental defilements; this is called *nirvāṇa*¹⁹, while in the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-śāstra* it is clearly stated that "it is called *nirvāṇa* because mental defilements are eliminated; and it is also called *nirvāṇa* because the three fires are extinguished"²⁰. Similarly in the **Abhidharmāvatāra-śāstra* we read: "It is called *nirvāṇa* because the fire of all afflictions and mental defilements is extinguished"²¹. Numerous examples of the likening of the three root defilements of passion, hatred and delusion, to the three fires can also be found in the Pāli scriptures.

There are three obstacles: the obstacle of passion, the obstacle of hatred, and the obstacle of delusion. There are three fires: the fire of passion, the fire of hatred, and the fire of delusion. There are three other fires: the oblatory fire, the householder's fire, and the fire of the gift-worthy²².

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that the term *karman* is used in both the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism in the sense of an action that determines the conditions of rebirth. It is a well-known fact that Śākyamuni referred to himself as a "proponent of karma" (*karma-vādin/kamma-vādin*), and it was for this reason that *karman* assumed importance as a means for attaining *nirvāṇa*.

¹⁹ *Tsa a-ban ching* 18 (Taishō 2: 126b)=*Samyutta-nikāya*, Vol. IV, p. 251 (38.1: "*Nibbāna*").

²⁰ Taishō 27: 147b.

²¹ Taishō 28: 989a.

²² *Tavo kiñcanā. rāgo kiñcanaṃ. doso kiñcanaṃ. moho kiñcanaṃ. tavo aggī. rāgaggi, dosaggi, mohaggi. apare pi tayo aggī. āhuneyyaggi, gabapataggi, dakkhiṇeyyaggi.* (*Saṅgīti-suttanta; Dīgha-nikāya*, Vol. III, p. 217)

What are the three obstacles here? The obstacle of passion, the obstacle of hatred, and the obstacle of delusion – these are the three obstacles.... What are the three fires here? The fire of passion, the fire of hatred, and the fire of delusion – these are the three fires²³.

O Monks, there are three fires. What three? The fire of passion, the fire of hatred, and the fire of delusion – these, O Monks, are the three fires. The fire of passion burns mortals hot with lusts, infatuated; next, the fire of hatred [burns] the malevolent, men who take life; and the fire of delusion [burns] those bewildered ones ignorant of the noble teaching²⁴.

These passages should all be interpreted as metaphors for the extinguishing of the three fires used in Vedic rites (*gārhapatya*, *āhavanīya* and *dakṣiṇa*)²⁵, that is to say, the negation of Vedic ritual. Corroboration of this is provided by the following passage in which Śākyamuni replies to a question put by the Brahman Uggatasarīra

²³ *Tattha katame tayo kiñcanā? rāgo kiñcanan doso kiñcanan moho kiñcanan. ime tayo kiñcanā ... tattha katame tayo aggī? rāgaggi dosaggi mohaggi. ime tayo aggī.* (*Khuddakavatthūni*, p. 368)

²⁴ *Tayo-me bhikkhave aggī. katame tayo? rāgaggi, dosaggi, mohaggi. ime kho bhikkhave tayo aggīti. rāgaggi dahati macce ratte kāmesu mucchite/ dosaggi pana vyāpanne nare pañātipāṭino// mohaggi pana sammūḷhe ariyadhamme akovide/* (*Itivuttaka*, p. 92)

²⁵ Vedic ritual is broadly divided into *Gṛhya* rites and *Śrauta* rites. The former, based on the *Gṛhya-sūtras*, are of a relatively small scale and are performed in the homes of Brahman householders, with only a single fire, called *gṛhyāgni*, being used, whereas the latter, described in the *Śrauta-sūtras*, are large-scale rites with separate altars for each of the above-mentioned three fires. Among these three fires, the "householder's fire" (*gārhapatya*) is mentioned already in the *Rg Veda*. The other two fires are lit from this fire, and it is the only fire that is never allowed to go out; its hearth is circular in shape. On its east side is situated the square hearth of the "oblatory fire" (*āhavanīya*), while to the south lies the semicircular hearth of the fire for cooking the dishes brought at the end of the rite as a token of thanks (*dakṣiṇa*). The fact that in its plural form the Sanskrit word for 'fire' (*agni*) signifies these three fires and in its dual form the *gārhapatya* and *āhavanīya* is a reflection of these functions. In Buddhist texts referring to the three fires, the sacrificial fires of these large-scale rites have presumably been regarded as representative of Vedic religion. On Vedic ritual and the sacred fires, see, e.g., L. RENOU - J. FILLIOZAT, *L'Inde classique: Manuel des études indiennes*, Vol. I, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1949; C. SEN, *A Dictionary of the Vedic Rituals, Based on the Śrauta and Gṛhya Sūtras*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1982, pp. 31, 64, plan 3.

about the true meaning of a large-scale sacrifice of five hundred cows, sheep and goats, which he had heard to be very fruitful and praiseworthy.

O Brahman, even before the sacrifice a man who lays the fire and sets up the pillar sets up three swords [of the body, speech and mind] that are evil, produce suffering, and result in suffering.... O Brahman, these three fires should be abandoned, should be shunned, and should not be used. What three? The fire of passion, the fire of hatred, and the fire of delusion. And for what reason, O Brahman, should this fire of passion be abandoned, shunned, and not used?²⁶

The three actions (*kamma*) of the body, speech and mind performed for the ritual killing of the sacrificial animals are here declared to be "three swords," and this is then rephrased in terms of the three mental defilements or fires of passion, hatred and delusion, which ought to be abandoned. The reason for the negation of the three fires is then given in these terms: "Obsessed by passion, he performs evil deeds and is born in an evil destiny. Mastered by hatred, he performs evil deeds and is born in an evil destiny. Mastered by delusion, he performs evil deeds and is born in an evil destiny."

The text in question then alludes to the three Vedic fires (*āhuneyyaggi*, *gahapataggi* and *dakkhineyyaggi*), which are associated with the man who honours his parents, the householder who honours his sons, womenfolk and servants, and the recluses and Brahmins who abstain from self-indulgence, are patient and meek, and control themselves respectively, and these, it is said, are to be revered and venerated. This may be interpreted as an example in

²⁶ *Aggiṃ brāhmaṇa ādhento yūpaṃ ussāpento pubb'eva yaññā imāni tīṇi satthāni ussāpeti akusalāni dukkhudrayāni dukkhavipākāni ... tayo 'me brāhmaṇa aggī pahātabbā parivajjetabbā, na sevītabbā. katame tayo? rāgaggi, dosaggi, mohaggi. kasmā cāyaṃ brāhmaṇa rāgaggi pahātabbo parivajjetabbo, na sevītabbo?* ("Mahāyāñña-vagga", *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, Vol. IV, pp. 43-44)

which fire as a symbol of desire in Brahmanism was negated and replaced by worthier objects of reverence and veneration.

Śākyamuni's discourse ends with the following statement: "The wood-fire (1) has to be always kept burning, (2) has to be always tended, (3) has to be always extinguished, and (4) has to be always abandoned." (1) and (2) presumably refer to Buddhist rites, while (3) and (4) refer to Brahman rites.

Genuinely desirable results are thus unobtainable by means of religious rites aimed at worldly benefits, namely, the fulfillment of desires, and the pursuit of desire does no more than lead one to an evil destiny. It is *nirvāṇa* that should be made one's goal, and this can be attained only by controlling desire. *Nirvāṇa* as a state of "extinguishment" should be understood as a new religious goal that was presented from a Buddhist standpoint to replace the sacrificial fires that it had "blown out."

IV. Conclusion

As has been seen in the above, the term *karman*, signifying Vedic rites, was often used in Buddhism in the sense of the ceremonies and procedures performed within the monastic community, while the three fires of Vedic ritual were reinterpreted in Buddhism as the three fires of passion, hatred and delusion, which consume the body and mind. The external fire of the *Vedas* was thus internalized as the fire of mental defilements. These teachings of Buddhism should be considered to have been predicated on the foregoing teachings of Brahmanism, and a similar background may be posited with regard to *prajñā* too.

When seeking to understand important religious terms, it is impossible to gain a correct understanding without taking their conceptual background into account, and if one interprets the relevant texts from such a standpoint, the above doctrinal contrast between the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism cannot be regarded as a mere coincidence.

Buddhism is a religion that emerged from the current of anti-Brahmanism. Therefore, the ideas that provided the framework for its community were formulated by criticizing and modifying earlier traditional religions. As is symbolized by the terms "anti-Vedism" and "anti-Brahmanism," at first sight one thus tends to think of Buddhism

as having made its appearance as an all-out critic of these earlier religions. But in reality the situation was not quite so clear-cut.

It would not of course have been possible for Buddhism to formulate its own religious thought and monastic organization by simply negating existing religions. Some aspects would have been absorbed while others were rejected, and there would also have been elements that were negated and still assimilated. Historically speaking, this latter case may be said to have been the predominating tendency. In other words, Buddhism chose the path of critically accepting and sublating foregoing religious thought. This would naturally have also applied to "wisdom," one of the most important concepts in religious thought.

When confronted with the wisdom of the *Upaniṣads*, which represented *prāṇa* and was equated with *ātman* and *brahman*, Buddhism had to provide from its own standpoint an answer to the question of "What is 'wisdom' in the true sense of the word?" It accordingly accepted the term "*ātman* qua wisdom" (*prajñā-ātman*)," representing the keynote of the *Upaniṣads*, and set about enhancing its conceptual depth by adding Buddhist connotations to it. This represented, in other words, the Buddhist transformation of *prajñā*. This reinterpretation of philosophical concepts in a Buddhist light is not merely a question of the dialectical development of religious doctrine, but would also have served an educational purpose by gradually leading the people of contemporary India towards a Buddhist way of thinking.